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Abstract

GRAPHIC INCLUSIONS

- The co-existence of post-industrial concrete structures and human body

The leading impulse which motivated me to discover new themes in my work was a confrontation between two worlds – inanimate matter and external structure of human body. Those who are still alive and those who we can only reminisce, the natural and what was manufactured. Often, when visiting the Tarnów Old Cemetery with my hundred-year-old grandma, I observed how the tombstones had lost their informational character – writings etched on to their surface became unintelligible.

It struck me how such a monolith, created by the human specifically to keep the memory alive, did not withstand the test of time. Standing beside me was my grandmother – always energetic, dutiful, strong and independent, sticking to her everyday rhythm and keeping it intact. I suddenly recognized that, with the passing of time, something had changed. An elderly woman who once was the embodiment of experience and respect became lost, frail and uncertain of the reality around her. I then realised there is a connection between these two worlds surrounding me – the world of nature and the world of human creations. I explore this metaphor further through a series of depictions of textures – that of human skin and of stone.

Aforementioned episode inspired me to create a new series of graphics. I decided to combine the stone, with which I worked for a number of years, and human body in a wholly new context, unfamiliar to me so far. I wanted to create a graphical composition, an inclusion of these two materials – compositions which would keep the memories of my grandmother, the texture of her skin with wrinkles reminiscent of her experiences. A graphical time capsule of sorts. I believe that somewhere in this combination of two worlds lay both fragility and frailness, and strength and perseverance. Working on this doctoral piece has become a very personal process encompassing a powerful emotional baggage.

When creating the “Inkluzje graficzne” (“Graphic inclusions”) series, I used multiple stencils which I created using the intaglio technique, incorporating recycled and digital stencils based on photo transformation.

I began with collecting photographic materials as photography helps me to encapsulate situations, collect motifs and textures. This beginning stage of realism mixed with elements of naturalism, which became a prelude to my doctoral thesis, was focusing on a cognitive analysis based on a series of photographs of an elderly woman. I decided to use close-ups of her face, hands, legs. These photo sessions incorporated chiaroscuro effects on human skin. I was aiming at venturing into its texture to emphasize its expressive quality, all while keeping the person behind it anonymous. Subsequent photographic films that I used are of deteriorating concrete blocks, stone structures which underwent the processes of erosion

and degradation. What also inspires me, is the toll of time etched to their surface and its undeniable destructive force. A profound insight into these fascinating phenomena influences my body of artistic work to a considerable degree. I think that decaying concrete and the remarkable structure of skin of an elderly person have a lot in common and their co-existence became the core of the graphical representation of my reflections on the subject.

Images from hand-made stencils have been imprinted on graphic papers, then they were scanned and transferred over to a computer to shape them into their final form. For me, the most important part of my work are layers. Graphic software helped me to collate, juxtapose and layer multiple structures, allowing for different components to permeate and fuse together. Thanks to this I can build up a vast tonal gradation, create space and narration for the themes I want to express. The composition becomes final by blending all layers into a single one. For printing, I decided to use pigment print which I have already worked with in my previous projects. The benefits of pigment print are most evident in black and white pieces, where grey tones are a result of a different gradation of grey ink. I believe this type of print best highlights multi-layering and monochromatic nature of my work.

This doctoral thesis consists of a series thirteen graphic pieces, 150 x 90 cm each, printed on a Museum Natural Rag 260 g / m² cotton paper.

Layering, condensing and harmony, as well as the clash between graphic matter are very important aspects which I have tried to incorporate into this piece of work. I intentionally veer towards non-descriptive visual themes, yet a keen observer will easily find fragments of human body, concrete or stone.

The aesthetics of human body, which I try to examine in my work, have been also brought closer to me through the Japanese philosophy of Wabi Sabi. It recognizes the aesthetic significance of feebleness and elusiveness of the world around us. It is a way of seeing the world where the most distinctive feature is the acceptance of imperfection and temporality of everything that exists. It is a stark contrast to the everyday consumerism and the overwhelming pace of our daily lives.

Kintsugi, a counterpart to Wabi Sabi, has proven to spark an interest in me as well. It is an ancient art of restoring broken pottery with Kintsugi masters making a quality of what is usually perceived as faults – breaks, scratches, signs of wear. They bring these visual shortcomings and blemishes to the forefront by putting the broken pieces back together with a gold dye. Broken pottery, the process of its creation and restoration is similar to the human existence, not shy of failures and suffering. The passing of time and experiences that come with it create the history of a person. As a result, the person becomes richer, precious and noble. These reflections of Wabi Sabi are intertwined with my own outlook on life.

The next chapter is devoted to the analysis of different aspects of oldness in contemporary world. By being the topic of scrutiny in sociology, psychology and medicine, it opens the ground for discussion. Contemporary society perceives oldness, being old as a negative: the loss of health, beauty, strength, independence. Contemporary culture is based on consumerist view on life promoting a single notion of beauty, we are constantly surrounded by images of perfect bodily beauty throughout various media: art, literature, advertising on

pornography. Getting old is a cultural taboo. We do not discuss the changes that take place in an aging body, accompanying diseases or dying. From the bodily perspective, aging and oldness is sombre, unsettling and disturbing. Contemporary man fights with it, masking and hiding its tell signs.

In my pondering I refer to Zbigniew Libera, whose "Obrzędy intymne" ("Intimate Rituals") from 1984 evokes the most profound emotions from all the works incorporating the subject of oldness I have seen. The artist shows raw videos of him taking care of his elderly, 90-year-old grandmother. Through the lens of camera, he records situations not only deeply profound, but also, at the same time, very ordinary. Through taking care of an elderly person close to me, I feel that I have something in common with Libera, but still, I only managed to watch the entirety of "Obrzędy intymne" after several attempts. Though much different in the nature of its expression and its language, it serves as a platform for common and similar ideas and themes to my works. Personally, I find his work a realistic, somewhat brutal depiction of one's aging, objectification and vegetation, but, on the other hand, it shows great compassion, sacrifice and love. It utilizes the author's own personal experiences and reaches down to the roots of our everyday existence.

My reflections on passing and elapsing of time, oldness, the temporality of things, the effect of time on our reality had in mind a goal of emphasizing the beauty in these phenomena. They are my personal feelings and observations which I have discovered when examining the subject. The passing of time and its effect on reality remain the main theme of my work and I feel there is yet much to discover. Summarising my endeavour, I must confess with a disappointment, that the topic of running time, challenging emotions relating to aging and passing, even though much present in art and scientific analysis', remains a topic somewhat marginal and unfamiliar. It does not go well with the consumerist attitude so present in the modern world. It remains a taboo subject, even though it is an intrinsic, inseparable part of our life.

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Częstochowa 20.02.2023